

The archaeology and materiality of mission in southern Africa

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Abstract The last three decades have yielded a vast body of multi-disciplinary literature on mission in southern Africa. Archaeology's contribution to this scholarship, however, has been relatively muted. In introducing this special issue on the archaeology and materiality of mission, we seek to add archaeological voices to this conversation, illustrating where contributors offer novel sources, research themes, and ways of considering encounters with Christianity. Far from simply adding material to fill the gaps left in the historical record, we argue that archaeological perspectives are well-positioned to explore ruptures and continuities through time, the tensions between peoples' imaginations and lived realities, and how Christianity may not always have been 'believed' but it was always materialised. Our hope is to spur a more inter-disciplinary dialogue that focuses as much on the intellectual trajectories that archaeologists of mission pursue as much as on the objects that they find.

Keywords: archaeology, mission, southern Africa, missionary societies

The southern African landscape is littered with the physical traces of past and on-going missionary activity: by the early twentieth century, South Africa alone had seen the construction of over 600 stations and some 4000 outstations, operated by missionaries from over 25 societies.¹ In some cases, these stations have today been drawn into heritage and tourism discourses, fenced off and memorialised or developed into idiosyncratic amalgamations of museum, library, and conference centre; elsewhere, their remains lie forgotten and inaccessible on private farmland, their tumbledown walls forming makeshift sheep kraals or robbed out for building stone; and in yet other instances, they sit surrounded by the (ruinous or functional) technical schools, hospitals, and post offices of colonial and subsequent infrastructure.

Southern African historiography discloses a similarly ubiquitous missionary presence, the flotsam and jetsam of a tide of activity that cast literate observers, and propagated literacy, over much of the subcontinent. It is hardly surprising, given the wealth of textual evidence contained in missionary archives and the pervasive influences that missionary activities have contributed to contemporary religiosity in Africa, that historical literature on the topic has attained positively leviathan proportions.

For much of the last three decades in southern Africa, this literature has been shaped by the seminal work of the Comaroffs, supplanting missionary narratives of their role in instigating religious transformations among African subjects with a secular discourse that embedded missionary activity within wider processes of colonial (and particularly capitalistic) expansion.² Both sets of stories are imbued with senses of rupture, cast in the first instance as spiritual awakening, and in the second as a dichotomous transition from the pre-colonial to the colonial, or as implicated in establishing in Africa that nebulous concept, ‘modernity’.

Critiques of this scholarship – its relative lack of emphasis on the realm of ‘religion’ (discussions of belief, conversion, etc.) and its reliance on heavily-encumbered missionary texts, for example – have prompting increasingly nuanced discussions of the historical trajectories of missionisation in the southern African subcontinent. Prominent here are Elizabeth Elbourne’s explorations of indigenous agency in shaping religious experiences, and of the ambiguous nature of many missionaries’ relationships with the colonial project more broadly.³

Latterly, the ‘linguistic turn’ has brought increasing attention to bear upon the specifics of the historical sources themselves; on the writings generated by missionaries and converts. For southern African readers, this will no doubt be familiar through a corpus of scholarship developing over the course of the last two decades that focuses on the compromises and accommodations embedded in missionary translation projections; the extent to which these translations allowed opportunities for indigenous agents to offer substantial input in shaping African Christianity, on the one hand, versus the implications of misconceptions, talking cross-purposes, and deliberate impositions of meaning on the part of missionary colonists, on

¹ D. Japha, V. Japha, L. Le Grange, and F. Todeschini, *Mission Settlements in South Africa* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 1993)

² J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa* (Volume 1), (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991); J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier* (Volume 2), (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997)

³ E. Elbourne, *Blood ground: colonialism, missions, and the contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002).

the other⁴. Significant too, is the recent scholarship of Paul Landau, whose observations of the ways in which missionaries drew upon a ‘popular political’ vernacular in deriving their religious vocabularies have proven a powerful stimulus for a radical re-thinking of highveld historiography.⁵ A series of ‘semiotic turns’ – founded on the principle that religion is fundamentally a sphere of public action manifest in material practices and objects – have taken this beyond the realm of ‘the word’. Webb Keane and Zoë Crossland’s explorations of the semiotics of mission encounter, and the ways in which this entailed slippage between words, concepts, and practices that attempted to cross social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries highlight the fact that a material ‘turn’ has much to offer mission studies – if we can only find ways to get at the specific ways that places and things behaved in the past.⁶

In September 2014, Karen Jacobs of the Sainsbury Research Unit (University of East Anglia) and Chris Wingfield of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (University of Cambridge) convened a three-day interdisciplinary conference, held at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and entitled “Missionaries, materials and the making of the modern world.”⁷ Beginning from the premise that evangelism re-shaped material worlds as much as it ‘colonised consciousness’, this conference focused on the material transformations embedded in missionary-indigene encounters. These facets of missionisation – the renunciation of circumcision and polygamy, the donning of European garb⁸, the burning of ‘heathen idols’⁹, or the building of rectangular homes¹⁰ with irrigated gardens – did not (or at least not only) *signify* Christian beliefs: rather, such enactments *were* Christianity, albeit with every bit as much potential for being ‘burlesqued’¹¹ or subverted as narratives of spiritual conversion.

⁴ W.H. Worger, ‘Parsing God: conversations about the meaning of words and metaphors in nineteenth-century southern Africa’ *Journal of African History* 42, 3 (2001): 417-447; I. Hofmeyr, *The portable Bunyan: a transnational history of The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004); D. Jeater, *Law, language, and science: the invention of the Native Mind in southern Africa*, (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2007); R. Gilmour, ‘Missionaries, colonialism and language in nineteenth-century South Africa’, *History Compass* 5/6 (2007): 1761-1777; R.S. Levine, ‘Cultural innovation and translation in the Eastern Cape: Jan Tzatzoe, Xhosa intellectual and the making of an African Gospel, 1817-1833’, *African Historical Review* 42, 2 (2010): 84-101; J.S. Arndt, ‘Missionaries, Africans and the emergence of Xhosa and Zulu as distinct languages in South Africa’, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois.

⁵ P.S. Landau, *The realm of the Word: language gender, and Christianity in a southern Africa kingdom* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993); P.S. Landau, *Popular politics in the history of South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 74-107.

⁶ W. Keane, *Christian Moderns: freedom and fetish in the mission encounter* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2007), pp. 21-24; Z. Crossland, *Ancestral encounters in highland Madagascar: material signs and traces of the dead* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 15-20.

⁷ Extending work from a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council networking grant, held by the same conveners, with Chantal Knowles of National Museums Scotland (“Who cares? The material heritage of British missions in Africa and the Pacific, and its future”).

⁸ J. Comaroff, ‘The Empire’s old clothes: fashioning the colonial subject’, In D. Howes (ed) *Cross-cultural consumption: global markets, local realities* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), pp. 19-38.

⁹ J. Sissons, *The Polynesian iconoclasm: religious revolution and the seasonality of power* (New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2014); M. Nuku, ‘The family idols of Pomare, Tahiti, French Polynesia’, in K. Jacobs, C. Knowles, and C. Wingfield (eds) *Trophies, relics and curios? Missionary heritage from Africa and the Pacific* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2015), pp. 29-36.

¹⁰ D. Jeater, *Law, language, and science*, pp. 105, 154-160; F. Vernal, ‘A truly Christian village’: the Farmerfield Mission as a novel turn in Methodist evangelical strategies, Eastern Cape, South Africa’, *South African Historical Journal* 61, 2 (2009).

¹¹ C. Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York, Basic Books, 1973), pp. 6-7

With a plenary session supported by the McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research (University of Cambridge), and a strong focus on the landscape and built environment of mission, Jacobs and Wingfield's conference brought together archaeologists and museologists working in Africa and the Pacific to explore (in the words of the call for papers) missionary involvement in 'practical projects to remake the world' and the 'global networks of exchange established by Christian missionary organisations'. The idea for this special edition grew from this conference, which brought together a number of southern Africanist scholars with a developing interest in mission archaeology. It is concerned to articulate roles for archaeological and materials-oriented approaches, focused as they are on the traces of African Christian enactments, within historical and anthropological dialogues on African mission. This issue brings together five contributions, with case studies encompassing the work of the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS), London Missionary Society (LMS), and Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS), working in Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

Platberg

Shelona **Klatzow's** paper focuses on the Wesleyan station of Platberg, on the Caledon, in addressing one of the thorniest problems confronting archaeologists of the colonial period: how to deal with historical processes of creolisation and syncretism in material cultural domains. She explores the ways in which Platberg's 'Bastard' inhabitants – under the captaincy of Carolus Baatje – negotiated the demands made by missionaries that they adhere to Christian lifestyles (manifested in specific material practices) with the mobile raiding strategies that developed among creole communities (Oorlams, Bastards, Koranas, and others) beyond the northern boundaries of the Cape Colony. She draws particular attention to how and where the missionary James Cameron's accounts of the mission station's construction, operations, and economy – aiming for self-sufficiency but struggling to fulfil this – depart from activities reported in official correspondence.

Both within southern Africa and the wider world, colonial encounters were transformative experiences, producing new political, economic, and linguistic entities, new material forms such as architecture and rock arts, and engagements with new commodities.¹² At the same time, such encounters were places where more familiar objects and behaviours were re-contextualised, and often mis-construed and mis-translated by colonial observers.¹³ Over the past several years, archaeological approaches to acknowledging this creativity – and the power relations inherent therein – have tended not to rely so much on identifying discrete components of the individual cultures in contact, but rather to look at what objects and people *did* once they were in a particularly dynamic cultural context. While North American and Caribbean archaeologies have explored such contexts through analytical concepts such as creolisation and ethnogenesis,¹⁴ these vocabularies have met with some resistance in Southern

¹² C. Gosden, *Archaeology and colonialism: cultural contact from 5000 BC to the present* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004); N. Thomas, *Entangled objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹³ A. Martindale, 'Entanglement and tinkering: structural history in the archaeology of the Northern Tsimshian', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 9, 1 (March 2009), pp. 59-91; A.B. Stahl, 'Colonial entanglements and the practices of taste: an alternative to logocentric approaches', *American Anthropologist*, 104, 3 (2002), pp. 827-845.

¹⁴ E.g. C. Stewart (ed), *Creolization: history, ethnography, theory* (Walnut Creek (CA), Left Coast Press, 2007); B. Voss, *The archaeology of ethnogenesis: race and sexuality in colonial San Francisco* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008).

Africa.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there is no denying the creativity and hybridity at work both during the colonial *and pre-colonial* periods,¹⁶ and that such hybridity could become entangled in colonial ideas about, for instance, morality, industry, and criminality.

Klatzow's discussion of the Platberg mission sits at the forefront of these concerns about identity and interpretation in material culture. Klatzow tells us at the outset that she is interested in unpacking some nuances of 'Bastard' identity at Platberg. By the end of the paper, we are left with the impression that her answer (at least provisionally, given that the project is on-going) is that it is perhaps useful to conceive of Platberg's Bastards as a community forged through the materiality of labour and daily practices, rather than solely through an adherence to a fundamental pre-Platberg identity.

To be sure, she tells us, faith and public performances thereof were part of forging Platberg as a Christian community. But what is salient for Klatzow as an archaeologist is the way that the *stuff* of Platberg (and there is an impressive amount of *stuff*, by the standards of southern African historical archaeology) literally worked to create the quotidian world of Platberg's residents. This chimes with recent literature in global archaeology exploring how 'communities of practice' were forged in contexts where creative knowledge and materials circulated among people sometimes in close proximity, sometimes separated by a considerable distance.¹⁷ Harvesting fruits from the mission's orchards, working Platberg's printing press, producing ceramics – these activities implicate skill and often engagements with new technologies that relied upon shared experience and technical know-how.

Staying with Platberg's *stuff* for a moment, it is worth noting that Klatzow's excavations thus far have yielded a remarkable assemblage of manufactured and exotic commodities that are found all too-infrequently at contemporary archaeological sites in the sub-continent's interior. While historical archaeologies from the Cape, and particularly the work of the Historical Archaeology Group at the University of Cape Town, have produced a dazzling array of diverse material cultures related to expanding mercantilism and local innovation,¹⁸ such largesse is not so common away from the Cape's major population centres. It is for this reason, perhaps, that historical and archaeological discussions of mission stations can address material culture in such rich detail: these sites represent a substantial investment in infrastructure and (often) a density and duration of settlement that makes the preservation of archaeological deposits more likely. That said, material assemblages of the sort described by Klatzow are still relatively hard to come by – especially from our perspectives as archaeologists specialising in ephemeral and short-lived sites. Not only do Klatzow's finds

¹⁵ But see S. Challis, 'Re-tribe and resist: the ethnogenesis of a creolised raiding band in response to colonisation', in Hamilton, C., and Leibhammer, N. (eds), *Tribing and untribing the archive: critical enquiry into the traces of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region from the Early Iron Age until c.1910* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2016), pp. 282-299.

¹⁶ Compare, for instance, Landau's use of the phrase '*métis*' to describe communities in the sub-continental interior, and Gavin Whitelaw and Simon Hall's discussion of 'accretions of identity' in the pre-colonial past within the same geographical space. Landau, *Popular Politics*, pp. xiv, 4, note 8; G. Whielaw and S. Hall, 'Archaeological contexts and the creation of social categories before the Zulu kingdom', in Hamilton and Leibhammer (eds), *Tribing*, pp. 146-181.

¹⁷ A.P. Roddick and A.B. Stahl (eds), *Knowledge in motion: constellations of learning across time and place* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2016).

¹⁸ See especially the *South African Archaeological Bulletin Goodwin Series* volume 7 (June 1993) special edition on 'Historical archaeology in the Western Cape' and C. Schrire (ed.), *Historical archaeology at the Cape: the material culture of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)* (Cape Town, UCT Press, 2014).

allow her to locate Platberg's Bastards within a major trading network, but it provides valuable insight into how certain commodities were arriving in the interior – at a considerable remove from major trading ports – and what they did once they arrived.

Finally, Klatzow's paper is notable for how she illuminates the co-presence of rain-making localities (associated with cohorts of 'Bushmen' and raiders) as sites of 'backsliding'. When her commentary on De Hoop (a rockshelter located near Platberg) in this paper is read alongside her previously published work on the site,¹⁹ we are left with two places described in evocative material detail as embodying complex problems of public and private dispositions to conversion (among other themes). For missionaries, the mission and De Hoop were clearly part of beliefs and practices that were in moral opposition to one another. Residents making use of De Hoop were undoubtedly enacting a range of other associations between the shelter, the mission, and the wider landscape, not least given the visible tension between the need to 'perform' Christianisation at the mission and the significance of the shelter. The presence of rock art at De Hoop, along with clear evidence of occupation for notable lengths of time, suggests a sensuousness and aesthetic to the shelter that would be intriguing to explore in future work. Through this broader, comparative work, as well as through finds like hearths existing alongside a functioning fireplace in one mission house, Klatzow beautifully illustrates the limits of missionary influence over material practices in the most quotidian of places.

Wittebergen

Rachel **King** turns to the work of the Wesleyans, and to a suite of Mfengu, BaSotho, and BaPhuthi communities in the southern Maloti-Drakensberg, in and around the Wittebergen Native Reserve (encompassing south-western areas of what is today Lesotho and the north-eastern portions of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province). Her paper looks to the material landscape as it was configured by Wesleyan missionaries and by a range of African agents, including Moorosi, the leader of a community of itinerant herders and cattle raiders. While first-hand accounts by these African agents are often absent, King argues that by combining missionary testimony with archaeological survey we can apprehend material practices that disclose the 'logics of landscape' operating within missionary and African communities alike.

In the first instance, her article explores the relationship between the Wittebergen station and the wider politics of the eastern Cape frontier; the native reserves, land appropriations, and uncertainties of violence that shaped interventions by colonial government and missionary institutions. King discusses the ways in which inter-related missionary perceptions of the topographical and climatic extremes of the southern Maloti-Drakensberg (as a 'waste howling wilderness') and of its inhabitants (as a 'headless horde' of 'voluntary barbarians') helped missionaries formulate material responses (designing and assigning settlement and field systems, attempts to control mobility through roads and mountain passes, and so on) that would facilitate their aims to generate a stable population of settled agriculturalist labourers.

In discussing the actions of Moorosi's BaPhuthi polity, King draws upon her wider archaeological survey of BaPhuthi homesteads and – particularly – the *liqhobosheane* of their ruling families. These latter (inaccessible mountain peaks) represented crucial nodes in a network of sites employed by a largely-peripatetic elite, 'activated' by occupation at

¹⁹ S.S. Klatzow, 'Interaction between hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking Farmers in the Eastern Free State', *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 2, (June 2010), pp. 229-251.

particular times to facilitate particular political and economic ends – often in the form of cattle raiding. In this latter, King emphasises that specific forms of action encoded as ‘disorderly’ by colonial writers (shaping colonial material responses, such as the establishment of police posts, magistracies, and telegraph networks) were laden with alternate meanings in indigenous systems of political discourse;²⁰ a discourse that was materially enacted in the movement of cattle, of raiding parties, in the formation of marriage and other alliances (e.g. with ‘Bushman’ raiders, or with Moshoeshoe I’s BaSotho), and in tributary and other exchange networks. King’s attention to this material dimension allows her to discern systems of authority and legitimacy that run counter to those overtly expressed by missionary and other colonial chroniclers. She thus provides a signpost for historians to take seriously the proposition that the material cultural traces discerned through archaeological perspectives provide direct statements by communities often silenced in written or oral historical texts.

Botshabelo

Where King’s paper takes a broad view of the ways in which missionary agents occupied what was, to them, an often-hostile and unintelligible terrain, Natalie **Swanepoel** focuses upon reconstructing and unpicking in detail the dynamics obtaining at a single node in the missionary landscape. She charts the work of the BMS among BaKopa and BaPedi communities at the site of Botshabelo (located in South Africa’s Mpumalanga Province), discussing the development of the material footprint of this work as it expanded from a religious centre to a large institutional complex, with a strong focus on education and vocational training programmes. Swanepoel’s sweeping material biography of Botshabelo illustrates that while Africanists may discuss the last two centuries in terms of ruptures in spiritual and political regimes, we can trace continuities in places, objects, and how people made their homes in these. Her discussion of a relatively new programme of work further permits glimpses of the life of a colonial boarding school that did much to form a new black elite; this is a novel and fascinating line of enquiry.²¹

Swanepoel’s discussion is especially attuned to the sensitivities of attempting to reconcile historical and archaeological perspectives on mission, and begins from the premise that archaeological sources have their own logics: to view them only in terms of their tendency to corroborate details revealed by historical analyses misses much of the nuance that their site-specific attentions can bring to bear on understanding the material trajectories of and daily praxis at particular stations. She pursues a strategy of archaeological field survey, targeted excavation, and map (and photographic image) regression to provide a perspective on shifting use of mission space over time, defining six phases of site occupation as the station transitioned through its multiple ‘lives’ – religious institution, educational centre, open-air museum and game reserve, and (most recently) subject of a land restitution claim.

Swanepoel draws particularly upon the concept of the archaeological palimpsest; the successive ways in which material traces are destroyed or re-worked at sites that have long trajectories of occupation. This concept operates at multiple scales as rooms are repurposed, houses subdivided, as different areas of the site fall into disuse, or as new practices accrete to the site in its wider social, economic, and political contexts. Such trajectories can be discerned through archaeological methodologies – stripping away paint and plaster from

²⁰ R. King, ‘Living on edge: new perspectives on anxiety, refuge, and colonialism in southern Africa’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 27, 3 (August 2017).

²¹ We are grateful to Robert Ross and Natalie Swanepoel for these points.

extant structures to reveal building histories, excavating to reveal wall foundations. Much of the emotional and aesthetic impact of the site as it exists today, Swanepoel points out, results from specific interventions over the course of the site's history, such as the dismantling of the educational facilities under apartheid policies or the re-painting of structures as part of the conversion of the mission to a heritage site in the 1980s. As each successive use of the site (including its initial establishment) drew upon and was shaped by pre-existing material conditions, understanding this palimpsest allows us to discern the forces and motivations that ensured a continuing relevance for this place, over time.

Excavated materials – mediated through the palimpsest of activity at the site – represent the physical traces of what mission (and later) residents were and (as importantly) were not doing at the site. The ceramic assemblages that Swanepoel discusses, for example, point to engagements on the part of all site residents with colonial capitalist economies: these assemblages are all dominated by imported wares, and further analyses (vessel refitting, use-and trace-wear) will provide more detailed information about the life histories of these specific objects. Conversely, the fact that excavations also revealed the continuing presence of locally-produced ceramics – seemingly trivial in and of itself – implies the simultaneous on-going maintenance of knowledge transfers within a community of practice, as well as access to specific resources. For Botshabelo, then, Swanepoel observes that historical missionary narratives discussing conversion as a processes of 'rupture' from traditional, non-Christian practices are not disclosed archaeologically; the stories told by the material traces point to gradual shifts in architectural design and construction, incorporation (rather than wholesale adoption) of new material cultural forms, and – perhaps most importantly – a series of accommodations and innovations that are discernible elsewhere in BaPedi and BaKona material practices at this time.

Khwebe Hills

In its accrual of substantial educational facilities in the early decades on the twentieth century, Botshabelo followed the trajectory of a 'successful' institutional form of missionary settlement. As such, it forms an illuminating juxtaposition with the site discussed in Ceri Ashley's paper, which focuses on the LMS's Lake Ngami mission among the BaTawana, in the Khwebe Hills of Botswana. By a number of metrics, this short-lived station (1893-1896) represents the antithesis of the results of the BMS at Botshabelo. It failed to achieve not only the explicit aims of the missionaries involved in its creation, but also to engender in the BaTawana the kinds of material and spiritual transformations that scholars have identified as emergent in colonial missionary projects elsewhere in southern Africa – and which formed the initial stimulus for the '*Missionaries, materials ...*' conference. Accordingly, it has left a very different set of archaeological traces.

As with the previous three papers, Ashley's analysis combines archaeological excavation and survey data with documentary archives; she takes this combination in a new direction, to explore the ways in which the aims and desires of *specific* LMS missionaries (focusing on Alfred J. Wookey) were enacted in a *specific* 'moment' in the historical trajectory of LMS presence in the subcontinent. This distinctive perspective makes the important methodological and theoretical point that archaeological perspectives on mission will of necessity contour to the particularities of the sites upon which they are based; to the physical nature of specific material remains 'on the ground', or to potentially-significant *absences* of particular remains.

In archaeological terms, the Khwebe hills station may be viewed as a ‘single-context’ site: its lifespan from construction to abandonment taking place over just a few short years, and largely under the aegis of a small, identifiable group of people. In this way too, then, it is the antithesis of Botshabelo, with its multiplicity of authors and complex palimpsest of shifting use – although, of course, the Khwebe hills site (at a different scale of analysis) is just as much an overwritten palimpsest of day-to-day life. Because Ashley is able to tie the Khwebe material much more closely to the actions and agenda of a specific set of historical personages, she is able to explore in detail the ways in which archaeological material traces reveal the ‘working out’ of these agendas in practice – as well as the input of agencies (human and otherwise) otherwise silent in the historical record. Here, Ashley explores the ways in which LMS agents developed models for institution infrastructure in accordance with the missionary ‘imagination’, which valorised gardens, irrigation, rectangular buildings in linear arrangements, and other physical forms as indicative of their civilising agenda. As expressed at particular institutions, however, local factors played a substantial role in shaping physical expressions. Relationships obtaining between missionaries and leaders of indigenous polities, climate, rainfall regimes and crop requirements, habitat tolerances of disease vectors (such as *Anopheles* sp.), and local geologies and physical geographies have all exerted forces on the traces encountered by contemporary archaeologists.

Ashley ties together Wookey’s writing on health, disease, and injury – ever-present concerns for a man who suffered debilitating malarial bouts – with the material expressions of the station he founded; its location in the high and dry (but arid and isolated) hills, rather than the more densely-populated swampy, malarial lowlands of Lake Ngami. She looks to the material traces that reflect the ‘pushing back’ of environmental, climatic, and (given a worryingly-high incidence of leopard attacks) even local biotic factors, all of which contributed to the failure of the Khwebe hills mission. Finally, and again relying on the specificity of a single-context site, Ashley is able to relate this failure also to its particular historical and political context. Despite its location being remote from colonial centres, this station was unlike the ‘pioneer’ missions of the Wesleyans in the Eastern Cape²² or of the early Trans-Gariepine LMS stations. The *realpolitik* of BaTawana elites in response to internal jockeying for power and to contacts with non-missionary elements of colonial society, she argues, played a large role in determining the ultimate lack of success of Wookey’s endeavours.

London

Reflecting on a very different suite of material evidences to those in the other papers, the final article of this volume explores the ramifications of missionary activity in southern Africa for the colonial metropole, as Chris **Wingfield** discusses the establishment, lifespan, and eventual dispersal of the LMS museum. The LMS museum was created and curated by the society over the course of just under a century, from 1814 to 1910, as a physical manifestation and celebration of LMS activity around the world – and as a tangible reminder to potential donors that the work of converting heathens was not yet complete. Despite working with a distinctive assemblage, however, Wingfield deploys a number of archaeological metaphors in constructing his approach to these objects; focusing on the museum as a site of deposition, and the necessity of understanding its ‘site formation processes’ and ‘taphonomy’ (this latter referring to how decaying matter fossilises) in order to make sense of the material it contains. Originally set up in a *wunderkammer* fashion, collecting ‘objects of curiosity’ that served

²² F. Vernal, *The Farmerfield Mission: a Christian community in South Africa, 1838-2008* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 53-83.

metonymically for the society's presence in far-flung corners of the globe, the museum came to focus explicitly on religious paraphernalia. The repudiation of this paraphernalia, and consequent rejection of heathenism and acceptance of Christianity that this implied, was made concrete by these objects' presence in the LMS collection.

As with Ashley's paper, Wingfield is able to link the material assemblage under investigation with specific individuals (focusing particularly on objects donated by John Campbell and Robert Moffat) – and through this, to connect the objects with specific mission encounters and agendas. He explores the relationship between object collecting and missionary travelling accounts, both of which presented missionary activity and African subjects to a (potentially paying) British public. Wingfield suggests that as the nineteenth century progressed, many of these objects acquired (at least for the LMS) a value based on their relationships with these pioneering, 'heroic' missionary men of the early phases of the society's work. At the same time, the African subjectivities constructed by European audiences from these objects were drawn into the emergent scientific, ethnological, and social evolutionary paradigms of a range of civic museums. By pursuing a course of 'excavating' these objects from their pictorial representations and appearances in published and unpublished written accounts, Wingfield is able to peel back some of the layers of meaning that accreted to them as a result of these transitions. By working backwards from the artefact assemblage to the framework of encounters and exchanges it embodies, Wingfield stresses that (whatever their subsequent re-imaginings in colonial stereotyping) these objects must be seen as products of this original framework.

The collection of objects represented by the LMS museum, assembled from missionaries working in many different parts of the world, provides an important countervailing perspective to the site-specific archaeological analyses that form the bulk of this special issue. Mission historiography has long recognised the fact that the circulation of people and of ideas between metropole and colony was central to the missionisation project; as, for example, revealed in the ways in which individuals were able to leverage their knowledge and experience in the missionary field into scientific authority and popularity on the lecture circuit.²³ Wingfield's contribution stresses the fact that these networks also circulated suites of material goods: by reuniting 'ethnographic objects' with missionary narratives, his analysis highlights the contingencies and reciprocities in the exchange of material goods between Africans and missionaries. Seen in this light, the LMS collections appear as counterpoints to the idiosyncratic assemblages of objects that missionaries bestowed upon local leaders they encountered – kaleidoscopes, wax dolls, and portraits of various members of European royalty.²⁴

Conclusion

In assembling these papers, we have sought to collect a suite of intertwined methodological and theoretical tools for discerning past 'materialities of mission', as revealed in the very

²³ J.M. MacKenzie, 'Missionaries, science, and the environment in nineteenth-century Africa', in A. Porter (ed) *The imperial horizons of British Protestant missions, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 106-130.

²⁴ J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, undertaken at the request of the London missionary society: being a narrative of a second journey in the interior of that country* (London, Francis Westley, 1822), volume 1, pp. 66-68, 233-234; J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, undertaken at the request of the London missionary society: being a narrative of a second journey in the interior of that country* (London, Francis Westley, 1822), pp. 223

different intellectual trajectories taken by each author and contoured to the specifics of the material assemblages they encounter.

The point, as we see it, is not to offer a material perspective to fill in the gaps within or to support the historical record, although these may certainly occur. Rather, our aim in assembling this collection is to contribute an archaeological voice to the vibrant (and, admittedly, clamorous) conversation about mission in southern Africa, and thereby ask what themes and observations a material-oriented perspective has to offer. The answers offered in this collection direct us to primary historical sources, landscapes, objects, and behaviours that interrelate in varied ways and with different evidentiary weights. We are reminded that archaeologies of African histories are endeavours that demand ‘promiscuous’ engagements with an array of sources, and a sensitivity to how time, space, and objects were experienced.²⁵

Indeed, in editing this special issue we have become aware that to add or amplify archaeologists’ voices to the mission conversation, we must draw attention not simply to the objects that archaeologists find, but to the sources, questions, themes, and practices that interest archaeologists and lead them to mission in the first place. While missionary enterprises occasionally yield a wealth of materials to excavate (as at Platberg) or to follow across the Atlantic (as with the LMS museum), they also offer other lines of enquiry for archaeologists, such as how land was imagined and experienced. This diversity of archaeological interest is as much about the availability of evidence as it is about archaeology’s remit as a discipline concerned with space, time, objects, and people. The authors in this issue explore concepts such as morality, knowledge production, attachment to place, cultural creativity, and how people coped with the tensions between their idealised visions of the world and its reality. As this collection demonstrates, inter-disciplinarity is not simply a matter of crossing the boundaries between different bodies of evidence, but of considering different ways of knowing the past.

With this in mind, we offer two brief final questions and statements as material fodder for further thought on missionisation in southern Africa. In particular, we have highlighted two questions to emphasise the potential value of material perspectives on missionisation in breaking down tenacious dichotomous views of African pasts: pre-colonial and colonial, colonial and post-colonial, tradition and modernity.

Our first question is, how does an attention to *materials* reveal ruptures and continuities in social formation? We have seen that, from a strictly materials perspective, the connection between ‘conversion’ and ‘colonisation’ is often more contingent than causal. While mission and Empire may have walked hand-in-hand, this was perhaps more a matter of timing than anything else. By focusing on themes of cultural creativity in the uptake of novel materials, on the maintenance of particular communities of practice or knowledge networks, and upon the role of objects themselves in assisting or resisting such processes, archaeology has much to offer. Such perspectives foreground the possibilities of considering missionisation not as only (or predominantly) a moment of rupture, but also as a process revealing continuities stretching into the deeper past and (given that missionary work is still a vital force, which now includes Africans operating in European contexts) into the future.

²⁵ B. Voss, ‘Image, text, and object: interpreting documents and artefacts as “labours of representation”’, *Historical Archaeology* 41 (2007), 4, pp.147-171.

Our second question is, in what sense do materials participate in conversations surrounding ‘belief’? Issues of ‘belief’ (and associated concepts) remain integral to contemporary scholarly debate about missionary histories; nowhere more so than in the question of what missionisation might mean in contexts where scholars query whether ‘religion’ and ‘belief’ are valid or useful analytical categories.²⁶ Here, we wish to return to the semiotic turn’s observations that missionary encounters are fundamentally concerned with public, performative, and communicative practices inhering in material bodies and objects. Inhering in the material world, they must be seen as thoroughly entangled with an ever-expanding suite of other themes: morality, trade, consumption, gender, time, memory, skill, craft, and (no doubt) many more. Archaeologies of mission, starting from the premise that issues of belief and conversion are inseparably entangled with materiality, may help ameliorate concerns regarding the appropriateness of imposing particular analytical categories (such as ‘belief’, ‘conversion’, or ‘religion’), by placing the historical ‘moment’ of mission encounters into longer material trajectories that stretch both further back into the past and forward towards the present.

²⁶ P. Landau, “Religion” and Christian conversion in African history: a new model, *Journal of Religious History* 23 (1999):1: 8-30